

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 EURE-00 SSO-00 NSCE-00 USIE-00 INRE-00

PM-03 L-02 NSC-05 CIAE-00 DODE-00 INR-05 NSAE-00

PA-01 RSC-01 PRS-01 SP-02 IGA-01 AID-05 SAM-01 EB-07

COME-00 TRSE-00 CIEP-01 OMB-01 SAJ-01 FRB-01 XMB-02

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TAGS: PFOR, EAID, SOPN, PO, US

SUBJ: MEDIA TREATMENT OF ECONOMIC ASSISTANCE OFFER

REF: BRUSSELS 9812

SUMMARY: ANNOUNCEMENT OF US AID TO PORTUGAL WIDELY PUBLICIZED
IN ALL PORTUGUESE MEDIA. POLITICAL SIGNIFICANCE STRESSED.
ANNOUNCEMENT SOMEWHAT OVERSHADOWED, HOWEVER, BY NEWS OF ARREST
OF PROMINENT PORTUGUESE BUSINESSMEN. END SUMMARY.

1. THE GOP ATTEMPTED EVENING OF DEC 13 TO ORCHESTRATE PUBLIC
ANNOUNCEMENT OF US ECONOMIC AID SO AS TO OBTAIN MAXIMUM LOCAL
PUBLICITY, BUT HAD TO SETTLE FOR SECOND BEST WHEN PRIME
MINISTER GONCALVES ORDERED COPCON THAT SAME AFTERNOON TO
ARREST 10 TOP PORTUGUESE BUSINESSMEN FOR "SERIOUS ACTS OF
ECONOMIC SABOTAGE." (SEPTEL)

2. THE ARRESTS LED EVENING TV AND RADIO NEWSCASTS DEC 13.

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TOP COSTA GOMES AIDE FERREIRA DA CUNHA WENT BEFORE THE

CAMERAS TO DELIVER PARAPHRASED VERSION OF JOINT ANNOUNCEMENT. HE STRESSED THAT THE US OFFER "REPRESENTED AN ACT OF POLITICAL SUPPORT FROM AN ALLIED COUNTRY AND AN OLD FRIEND."

3. NEWS OF THE US AID PROGRAM WAS GIVEN THE FULL, FRONT PAGE TREATMENT BY THE SATURDAY MORNING PRESS DEC 14. ALL SATURDAY PAPERS CARRIED THE FULL TEXT OF THE ANNOUNCEMENT. AFTERNOON PAPERS RAN TEXT ON INSIDE PAGES. AFTERNOON "DIARIO DE LISBOA" TACKED ON FERREIRA DA CUNHA COMMENT.

4. ANNOUNCEMENT WAS TOP NEWS STORY IN LISBON MORNING "O SEculo" AND OPORTO'S "PRIMEIRO DE JANEIRO" AND "JORNAL DE NOTICIAS."

5. "DIARIO DE NOTICIAS," LISBON'S LARGEST CIRCULATION DAILY, LED WITH STORY ABOUT ARRESTS, BUT ANNOUNCEMENT OF US AID FEATURED PROMINENTLY ABOVE CENTER-FOLD BELOW A FOUR-COLUMN HEAD.

6. BOTH "DIARIO DE NOTICIAS" AND "PRIMEIRO DE JANEIRO" FOLDED IN SPECULATIVE STORIES FROM REUTERS AND AGENCE FRANCE PRESSE IN THEIR OTHERWISE FACTUAL TREATMENT OF THE NEWS. THE REUTERS REPORT HAD APPEARED IN LISBON'S FRIDAY AFTERNOON PAPERS. DATELINED WASHINGTON, REUTERS STORY SAID THAT ACCORDING TO A WELL-INFORMED SOURCE "THE INITIATIVE REFLECTS INCREASING INTEREST IN THE US OVER WHAT IS ACTUALLY TAKING PLACE IN PORTUGAL AND A PREOCCUPATION WITHIN (US) GOVERNMENT CIRCLES WITH COMMUNIST INFLUENCE IN LISBON." REUTERS WENT ON TO SAY THAT THE SAME SOURCE SAID THE "OFFER OF ECONOMIC ASSISTANCE WAS NOT LINKED TO THE AZORES BASE NEGOTIATIONS."

7. IN ADDITION, BOTH PAPERS CARRIED AN AFP COMMENT THAT "OBSERVERS RECALL THAT THE US HAS BEEN ACCUSED OF CONTRIBUTING TO THE OVERTHROW OF ANOTHER LEFTIST GOVERNMENT--THAT OF ALLENDE IN CHILE--BY OPPOSING THE CONCESSION OF CREDITS TO CHILE. THE PRESENT OFFER OF AMERICAN ASSISTANCE CONSTITUTES A GESTURE OF US CONFIDENCE IN PORTUGAL'S FUTURE."

8. UNFORTUNATELY INFLUENTIAL WEEKLY EXPRESSO WAS NOT DISTRIBUTED SATURDAY DUE TO DISPUTE WITH VENDORS.

9. COMMENT: THE GOP WENT ALL OUT TO GIVE THE ANNOUNCEMENT LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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MAXIMUM PUBLICITY. THE TIMING OF THE ANNOUNCEMENT, COMING IN THE MIDDLE OF THE SOCIALIST PARTY'S CONGRESS, WAS A CLEAR BOOST FOR MARIO SOARES. SOARES TOLD HENRY GINIGER OF THE NEW YORK TIMES THAT THE POLITICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF THE US INITIATIVE FAR OUTWEIGHS THE ECONOMIC CONTENT. ANNOUNCEMENT OF US CONFIDENCE IN PORTUGAL'S FUTURE COULD NOT HAVE COME AT A BETTER PSYCHOLOGICAL MOMENT.
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